



SYRIAN-ARMENIANS' INTEGRATION EXPERIENCE IN ARMENIA: THE MECHANISMS TOWARDS OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES TO INTEGRATION

The Problem

As a consequence of the conflict in Syria, since 2011, a massive inflow of Syrian-Armenians to Armenia has signalled a period of new problems and challenges for them, which first of all has been conditioned by deficiencies in Armenia's migration policies as well as lack of urgent and practical steps undertaken on state level. The Armenian policies towards Syrian-Armenians have been of incidental nature. The policies have been shaped as responses to the problems facing the country. Hence, policies towards Syrian-Armenians who moved to Armenia as a result of the Syrian conflict have been recognised as a necessity since 2012. It was obvious that Armenia was not ready to provide conditions for the organised inflow of migrants and to ensure conditions for any further developments related to their integration. The experience of Syrian-Armenians integration in Armenia is an interesting subject for research and policy development (either from the perspective of the host country or the migrants' social group).

The perceptions of the same ethnic group (regardless of motives) towards migration and repatriation, the existence of the Armenian Diaspora, the Armenian migration policy and the situation of the country dictate a special approach to integration policy, which has to be based on evidence-based research and analysis. Generally, the migration flows over the course of the last century points to the need of establishing programs on hosting, accommodation and integration for the various groups in Armenia.

The purpose of this research was to develop a conceptual framework for the integration of migrants and identify integration mechanisms based on the example of Syrian-Armenians' experience. The research identifies problematic issues in the scope of Syrian-Armenians' integration by looking at socio-cultural and economic spheres and offers an assessment of state policy programs on their integration.

Key Findings

- ∇ The various groups of Syrian-Armenians in Armenia experience different problems and choose different ways of overcoming them.
- ∇ Representatives of the older age group experience increased difficulties in terms of integrating into the new community. As a result, they are either not eager to integrate or do not try to instead choosing to return.
- ∇ Young representatives of the group easier adapt to the new environment. They are better equipped for changes and the new environment, as well as are lesser attached to their property.
- ∇ For women Syrian-Armenians the new Armenian environment seems to be safer, and they tend to feel at ease towards issues on different levels, ranging from public attitudes towards them to the choice of their economic activity.
- ∇ Those with higher education can hardly find a fitting employment in Armenia and think they would have much more opportunities to do so in Syria. Those with high school education tend to be seeking easier ways of "employment" and rather take advantage of the refugee status.



- ∇ The outlier representatives of the group in highest and lowest socio-economic status tend to leave Armenia: either to return to Syria or another country.

The analysis of Syrian-Armenians' integration practices and the ways of overcoming them shows that it is most difficult to deal with economic problems. The solutions call for implementation of a range of steps by various groups and institutions. In the economic sphere, the problems of Syrian-Armenians are conditioned by country's economic system, small market, the differences in the previous and current employment cultures, discrepancy and incompatibility in specialisations and other factors.

It is relatively easy to overcome socio-cultural issues, as the potential of the group, social environment and other indirect support represent favourable conditions. The Syrian-Armenians are recognised by a number of commonalities with the Armenian society, including nationality, religion, language (to some extent), and as a result, the cultural differences and problems of social participation did not represent a problem.

Hence, the integration of Syrian-Armenians in Armenia is an ongoing process, and there are problems subject to solutions. The case of Syrian-Armenians allows following the process of migration and integration in all their phases of development, by thus providing an opportunity to develop a comprehensive document, which will include effective mechanisms aimed at overcoming the existing problems (including for similar cases in the future). The current research puts forward recommendations based on general migration practices and specific policies targeting Syrian-Armenians.

Recommendations

Professional Activities

- The Armenian Ministry of Economic Development and Investments, Ministry of Diaspora along with Small and Medium Entrepreneurship (SME) Development and Coordinating bodies and civil society organisations (CSO) should **develop** a “Syrian-Armenian brand”, to be applied to any production or services provided by Syrian-Armenians' community. The brand should be developed to exercise a separate tax and income policy.
- **To establish** a CSO or a State Non-Commercial Organisation, which will provide support, mentorship and guidance to the Syrian-Armenian-beginners in business, to equip with necessary advice regarding market volumes, economic system, business culture, economic financial planning, and tax and customs legislative framework.
- The employers and trainers should **provide** Syrian-Armenians (who express their wish to work) a specifically designed paper, a guidance, with information and description on training, probation period, participation in exchange learning opportunities, which further can be used as a preparatory information in applying for employment.
- The public and private sectors should **provide** opportunities and platforms for self-employed or individuals engaged in small business enterprises, as well as for small groups wishing to develop entrepreneurial activities. SME centres and CSOs can establish multi-vector voluntary, business or start-up groups by engaging both Armenians and Syrian-Armenians.

Education

- The Armenian Ministry of Education and CSOs working on education issues should **organise** awareness raising trainings, in order to overcome the systemic differences in an attempt to comply with the Armenian educational standards for Syrian-Armenians.



- The Armenian Ministry of Education and other relevant institutions should **coordinate** the involvement of targeted groups of Syrian-Armenians to the higher educational institutions based on their specialisations, where the working groups adjacent to faculties will implement activities by raising awareness on the corresponding professions and specialisations, possibilities and necessary conditions for their involvement.
- The Armenian Ministry of Education should **introduce** programs aimed at solving the integration problems of Syrian-Armenian children, for example organising supplementary training for children and targeted consultations with parents aimed at their improved understanding of the Armenian education sector.

Socio-Cultural Issues

- Notwithstanding that socio-cultural obstacles are relatively easy to overcome, there is still a need **to develop** programs aimed at Syrian-Armenians' integration practices, considering the specifics of the Armenian environment, and for the purposes of the group's social advancement and self-realisation.
- **To promote** a cultural dialogue and exchange of experiences (including from professional skills to traditional aspects of everyday-life) between the various groups of Syrian-Armenians and Armenians. As an example, public institutions and CSOs can organise festivals, cultural days etc., events, which as opposed to the previous experience will not only include Syrian-Armenians. Involvement of Armenians in such activities will stimulate dialogue between the two groups by thus identifying solutions to the problems that the community faces in Armenia.
- **To implement** professional activities on exchange of experiences based on specialisations and needs, by using the available statistical data provided on Syrian-Armenians in Armenia. Organisations from private and non-governmental sector, entrepreneurs and individuals should be included in exchange activities.
- Public institutions and CSOs should take initiative to develop special programs for different gender and age groups with the purpose to establish a networking platform and introduce them to the socio-cultural field. As an example, the activities can include theme-focused camps and events for youth employing learning, teaching, sports and other functions, with Syrian-Armenian and Armenian participants.
- The public, international institutions and CSOs should **establish** scientific and research grants, with mandatory criteria of Syrian-Armenians and Armenians from Armenia equal participation. The grants should be directed towards involvement of Syrian-Armenians in the various sectors.
- **To promote** the representation of Syrian Armenians in the information field of Armenia through media, cultural and educational platforms, in order to ensure communication with the public. As an example, a media service can be established in cooperation with Armenian and Syrian-Armenian journalists to cover issues related to Syrian-Armenians and the Armenian community in Syria. Another option can be developing a TV program aimed to host Syrian-Armenians, to cover their traditions, practices of daily routine, cuisine.

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